



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Bear Lake National Wildlife Refuge

Oxford Slough Waterfowl Production Area

Planning Update Number 1, June 2010



Geese in flight / USFWS

Comprehensive Conservation Planning Begins at Bear Lake Refuge

Bear Lake National Wildlife Refuge (NWR, Refuge) is initiating a planning process to develop a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) that will guide management of the Refuge over the next 15 years. This is the first in a series of planning updates we will distribute to keep you informed and invite your participation in the planning process.

When we use the term “Refuge,” we include the Thomas Fork Unit of Bear Lake NWR and Oxford Slough Waterfowl Production Area (WPA). As we work through

this two-year CCP process, we have the opportunity to look at the Refuge’s management from fresh perspectives. The purposes of the Refuge will remain the same as when they were established—primarily to provide habitat for waterfowl and other migratory birds.

Through the planning process, however, we will review our management of habitats such as wetlands, meadows, agricultural lands, and riparian areas; and each of our public use programs, including wildlife observation

and photography, hunting, environmental education, and interpretation.

Your insights and observations are needed to provide us with a more complete and thoughtful process. We invite you to share your ideas with us by attending a public open house in Montpelier, Idaho, on July 1, 2010, or by submitting written comments by July 21, 2010 (for contact information, see page 6). Your thoughts are important to the success of this effort!

—Annette de Knijf, Refuge Manager

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Public Open House Meeting

We will hold a public open house on July 1, 2010, in Montpelier. See page 6 for details.

Your participation is critical for a successful planning process!

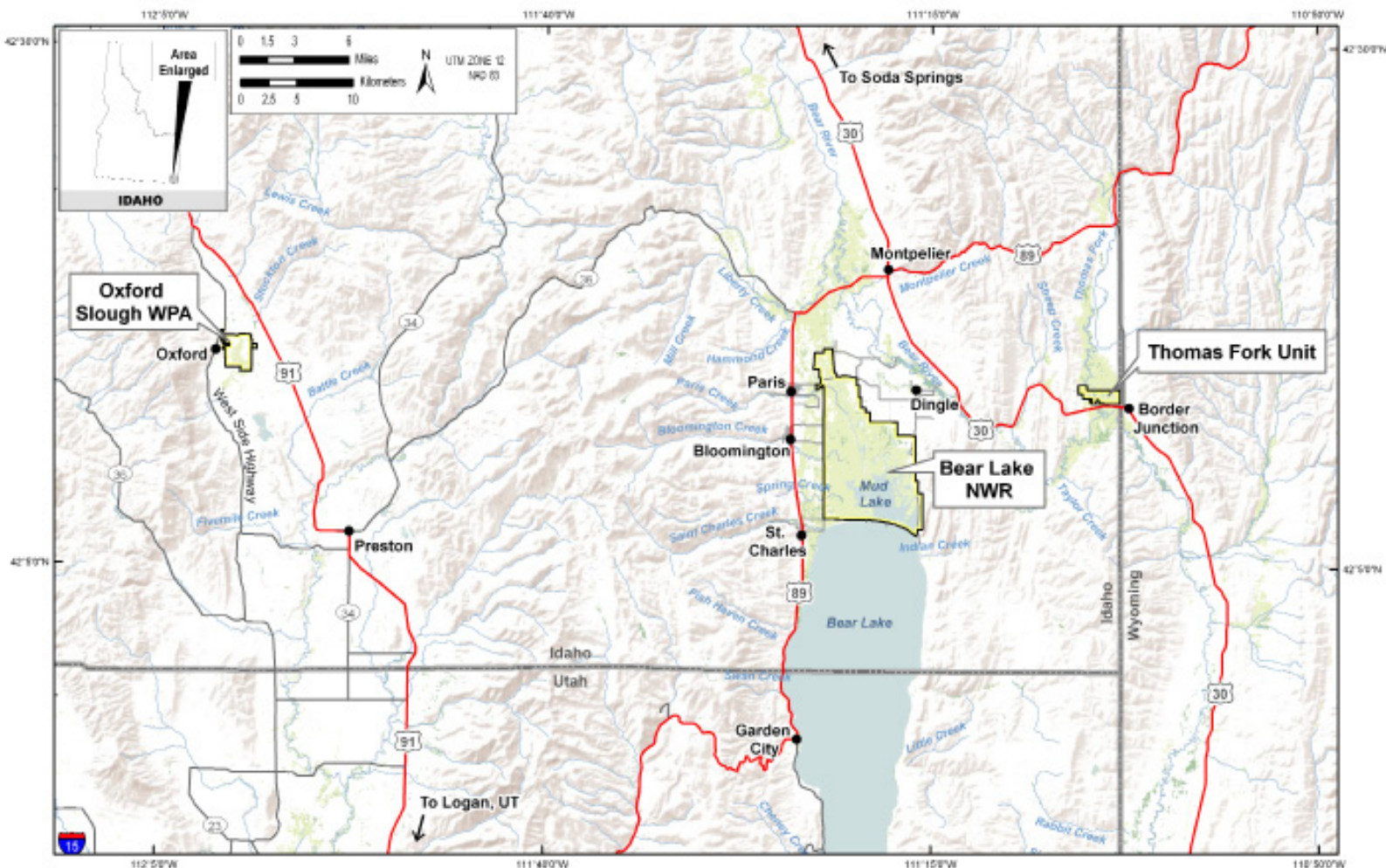
Refuge Overview

Bear Lake NWR was established in 1968, when management of 17,000 acres of public land in Idaho's Bear Lake Valley was transferred to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) for the purposes of protecting and managing habitat for migratory birds. This area, the "Dingle Marsh," was known to be an important nesting area for white-faced ibis, herons, egrets, gulls, terns, grebes, ducks, and geese. In most years, about 75% of the current 19,083-acre refuge is open water and marsh; the remainder consists of grasslands, wet meadows, and steep shrub-covered slopes. Wetlands are managed as a complex of habitats, meeting the needs of birds with very different life history requirements.

Historically the Bear Lake Valley was a hunting ground for the Shoshone, Ute, and Bannock tribes. The valley was settled in 1864 by members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. In the early 1900s the Telluride Canal Company developed a diversion system that connected the Bear River to Bear Lake, and allowed a significant portion of the river's flow to be stored in Bear Lake for future irrigation use. The project significantly altered the hydrology and ecological processes of the Bear Lake watershed.

The 1,015-acre Thomas Fork Unit (TFU) is a satellite of Bear Lake NWR, located near the town of Border, Wyoming. Land for the unit was transferred to the Service from the Farm Home Administration in 1995, to be used for conservation purposes. The TFU consists primarily of wetland habitat, including a 2.75-mile riparian zone along Thomas Fork Creek. The TFU provides important habitat for sandhill cranes, other migratory birds, and Bonneville cutthroat trout. The area was historically used by settlers traveling the Oregon Trail as they attempted to ford the Thomas Fork Creek.

The 1,878-acre Oxford Slough WPA was purchased from the Federal Land Bank in 1985, using Federal Duck Stamp funds for the purpose of preserving small natural wetlands and associated uplands. It is located near the town of Oxford, Idaho, and is the only waterfowl production area in Region 1 of the Service. The Oxford Slough is dominated by a deep bulrush marsh, but also has a diversity of shallow marsh, wet meadows and drier alkali uplands, with some farm units.



Preliminary Goals

Goals are broad statements intended to provide direction for future management of the Refuge. They are based on Refuge purposes, the mission and policies of the National Wildlife Refuge System, input received through this planning process, and key issues identified as most significant to the Refuge. The planning team has developed the following preliminary goals for the Refuge and would like your input on them.

Preliminary Wildlife and Habitat Goals

Goal 1: Wetland Management

Simulate functional values and varied natural hydrologic regimes among wetland management units, while providing consistent geographic availability of Refuge wetland habitat on an annual basis.

Goal 2: Riparian Management

Provide high quality riparian habitat within the watershed for the life history requirements of focal wildlife species, while simulating natural environmental processes.

Goal 3: Native Upland Management

Maintain and protect the existing integrity of functional early successional upland habitat and restore the natural range of variability and resiliency to late successional upland habitat.

Goal 4: Non-Native Agriculture Management

Provide a supplemental on-Refuge forage base for carbohydrate and protein requirements of migratory waterfowl and landbirds within the Bear River migratory corridor.

Goal 5: Invasive Species Management

Perpetuate ecological resistance and a rapid

management response to the pervasive threat of invasive species within native Refuge habitats.

Goal 6: Inventory and Monitoring

Utilize inventory, monitoring, surveys, and research to gather scientifically sound information to support adaptive management decisions and management.

Goal 7: Wildlife Dependent Recreation and Public Use

Increase public understanding and appreciation of wildlife, and build support for Bear Lake NWR and Oxford Slough WPA by providing opportunities for all visitors to participate in safe, quality, wildlife-dependent recreation and education programs, while minimizing wildlife disturbance.

Goal 8: Historic and Cultural Resources

Increase the understanding and appreciation of the unique historic, archaeological, and cultural resources of the Bear Lake Watershed by Tribes, local communities, and visitors alike.

Goal 9: Land Protection and Acquisition

Secure key habitat areas through cooperative management arrangements and/or purchase of conservation easements on a voluntary basis.

Public Use of the Refuge

The National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, as amended, identified six priority refuge uses: hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation. These uses receive enhanced consideration in planning and management over all other general public uses on refuges. When compatible, these wildlife-dependent recreational uses are to be strongly encouraged. These uses, as well as other current or proposed uses, receive an extensive compatibility review in the CCP before being allowed. Under Service compatibility policy (603FW2), refuges with limited staffing and funding are required to make efforts to obtain additional resources or outside assistance to provide wildlife-dependent recreational uses, and to document those efforts before determining that any of these uses are not compatible.

Bear Lake Refuge must manage ever-increasing requests for visitation and demand for visitor services programs with a very small staff. Currently, the visitor services and public hunting program at the Refuge is mostly “self serve”, with informational kiosks and interpretive displays. To date, the visitor services emphasis is placed on maintaining visitor and hunter facilities, welcoming and orienting visitors, answering information requests, and law enforcement during the hunting season.

Questions to Consider

- *Should existing public uses be continued, reduced, or eliminated?*
- *Should the Refuge improve its visitor services program?*
- *What actions should be taken to minimize wildlife disturbance issues from public visitation and recreation?*

Management Issues, Challenges, and Opportunities

As part of the CCP process, a range of possible alternative management approaches will be explored and evaluated, including current management practices. The effects of the various alternatives on the biological resources and local communities will be evaluated in an Environmental Assessment (EA) that is prepared concurrently with the CCP, in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act. The planning team has identified some potential issues to be considered. We encourage you to provide us with written comments on these issues and other concerns, and to meet us at our public open house. If you aren't able to attend the open house on July 1, please submit your comments in writing by July 21, 2010 (see the back page for contact information.)

Habitat Management

Water level management is the overriding factor affecting most Refuge habitat management strategies for nesting birds and wildlife, particularly water birds and muskrats. Management efforts focus on maintaining a given emergent-marsh-to-open-water-habitat ratio using water level manipulations, prescribed fire, and mechanical disturbance.

Riparian habitats comprise a small but important component of Refuge ecosystems. Native fishes historically present within the Refuge waters included Bonneville cutthroat trout. Since these creeks do not originate on Refuge lands and significant portions of the watersheds lie outside the Refuge, upstream activities have major impacts on Refuge water quality and quantity.

Widespread population and habitat declines have been projected for numerous sagebrush associated species. A growing sense of urgency over the outlook for sagebrush dependent wildlife has spawned sagebrush planning and restoration efforts within Idaho.

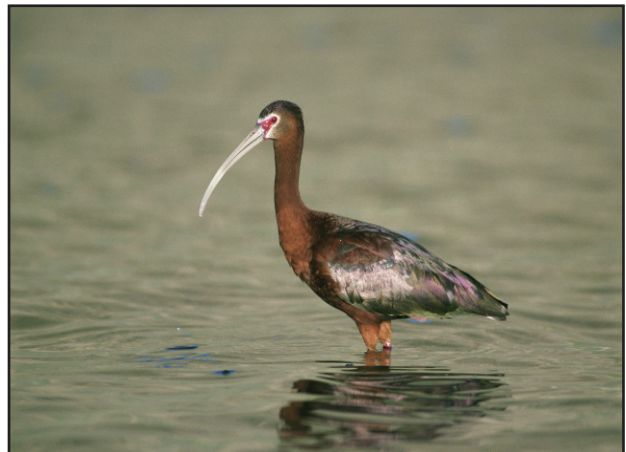
Agricultural small grains and short-cover areas at the Refuge provide valuable foraging habitat for key bird species such as cranes, geese, and curlews.

Questions to Consider

- What are the best means to attain productive marsh habitats for Refuge wildlife?
- How can the Service protect and improve the quantity and quality of Refuge water for fish and wildlife resources?
- What can the Service do to prevent the introduction and dispersal of invasive plants and animals and facilitate their removal from the Refuge?
- What should the Refuge's role be in supporting native fish and riparian habitat restoration?
- What are the most appropriate management techniques for the Refuge's wet meadow and upland habitats to maximize habitat values for key wildlife species (e.g., sandhill cranes, Canada geese), while assuring other native wildlife cover and forage requirements are still satisfied?
- What is the appropriate role of prescribed fire in habitat management and fuels reduction?
- Should the Refuge attempt cooperative and joint watershed management strategies within Bear Lake and Bear River watershed?
- How can the Refuge engage or adaptively manage in response to predicted and unpredicted challenges posed by climate change?
- Given limited budgets and manpower, how can the Refuge most appropriately assess the efficacy of management actions at the appropriate scale?



Sandhill cranes / © Dennis Derby



White-faced Ibis / © Dave Menke

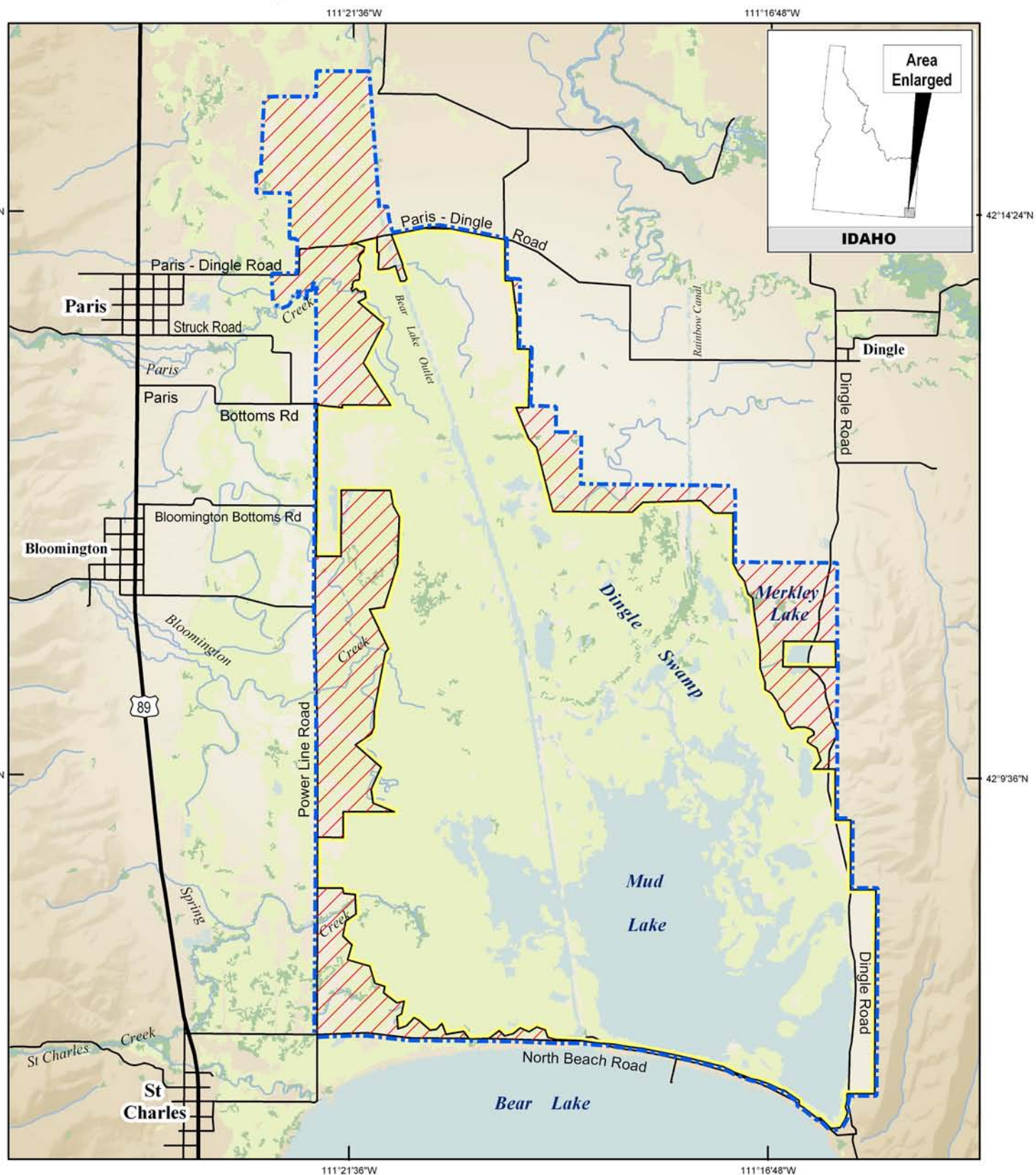


U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Bear Lake National Wildlife Refuge

Bear Lake County, Idaho

Refuge Boundary Map



PRODUCED IN THE DIVISION OF REALTY & REFUGE INFORMATION
PORTLAND, OREGON
LAND STATUS CURRENT TO: 06/15/2010
MAP DATE: 06/15/2010
FILE: 10-132.MXD

- Acquired Interest (Owned in Fee & Easement)
- Inholding
- Approved Refuge Boundary

Note: Approved refuge boundaries may contain private inholdings.

- National Landcover Dataset 2001
- Emergent Herbaceous Wetlands
 - Open Water
 - Woody Wetlands

0 0.5 1 Miles
0 0.9 1.8 Kilometers
UTM ZONE 12N NAD 83

We Are Interested in Your Views about Bear Lake National Wildlife Refuge

We value your input as we work to prepare a Comprehensive Conservation Plan for Bear Lake National Wildlife Refuge. If you have a few minutes to respond, it will help us to identify issues, concerns, and opportunities for the Plan.

Why is Bear Lake National Wildlife Refuge special to you?

Which activities would you like to enjoy at the Refuge over the next fifteen years? Check all that apply.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bird watching/observing wildlife | <input type="checkbox"/> Waterfowl hunting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Photographing wildlife or scenes of nature | <input type="checkbox"/> Upland game hunting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hiking or walking | <input type="checkbox"/> Small game hunting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Driving/auto touring | <input type="checkbox"/> Fishing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Canoeing | <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Education |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cross-country skiing/snowshoeing | <input type="checkbox"/> Interpretation |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please list): |

What issues, concerns, or opportunities should the Refuge address in its Comprehensive Conservation Plan?

What suggestions do you have to address your issues of concern?

Thank You! Please respond to us by July 21, 2010.

You may mail this form, fax it to (208) 847-1319, or drop it off at the Refuge office. You may also submit comments by email to FW1PlanningComments@fws.gov. Please type "Bear Lake CCP" in the subject line.

All comments received from individuals, including names and addresses, become part of the official public record and may be released. Requests for such comments will be handled in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act, the Council on Environmental Quality's NEPA regulations [40CFR1506.6(f)] and other Service and Departmental policies and procedures.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will use this information to better serve the public. There is no requirement to provide a response or to use this form. Response is voluntary, and providing your name, organization and address is optional.

Would you like to remain on the mailing list to receive subsequent information about this project?

____ Yes ____ No

If yes, please provide your contact information:

Name:

Street Address:

City, State, Zip:

Additional Comments?

Fold here and tape ends

*Place
stamp
here*

U.S. Department of the Interior
Fish and Wildlife Service
Bear Lake National Wildlife Refuge
P.O. Box 9
Montpelier, ID 83254



Bear Lake National Wildlife Refuge
PO Box 9
Montpelier, ID 83254

Refuge Open House July 1 in Montpelier

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How Do I Contact the Service or Provide Comments?

To be included on the mailing list, provide comments, ask questions, or request information, please contact:

By Mail:
Bear Lake National Wildlife Refuge
370 Webster
Box 9
Montpelier, Idaho 83254

By Phone:
208-847-1757

By Fax:
208-847-1319

By Email:
FW1PlanningComments@fws.gov -or-
annette_deknijf@fws.gov
(Please place "Bear Lake NWR CCP" in the subject line.)

Please provide comments by July 21, 2010.

You are invited to the Open House!

We'd love to see you at our upcoming public meeting. It's our chance to hear your thoughts about management of the Refuge over the next fifteen years.

July 1, 2010
Bear Lake County Senior Citizens Center
115 S. 4th St.
Montpelier, Idaho 83254
6:30 - 8:30 pm

Planning Schedule

(Schedule dates are tentative and subject to change as the planning process progresses.)

Planning Update 1 June 2010
Public Open House July 1, 2010
Planning Update 2 August 2010
Planning Update 3 (Preliminary Alternatives) November 2010
Public Review/Comment on Draft CCP/EA April 2011
Final CCP May 2012